

## Can alcohol cause seizures?

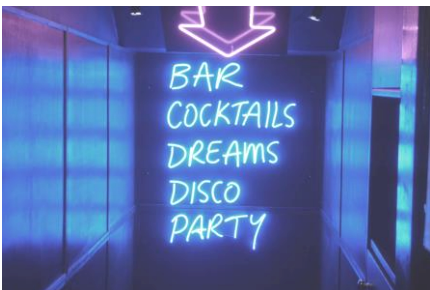
Some people with epilepsy are more vulnerable to the effects of alcohol than others, but drinking alcohol can trigger seizures in people with epilepsy.

Seizures related to alcohol *misuse* are more common than with any other form of substance. Alcohol has been known to trigger or worsen seizures when associated with heavy or 'binge' drinking. Many alcohol related seizures can be linked with:

- Alcohol withdrawal – This is when seizures occur within the first 6–48 hours after a heavy drinker suddenly stops drinking alcohol. If these seizures happen often and alcohol abuse has happened over a long time, damage to brain tissue may occur, which can lead to developing epilepsy.
  - Note: If you are drinking too much and want to change, detox and treatment for alcohol addiction usually requires medical supervision and a lot of support. Plan it with a qualified professional or rehab centre to avoid withdrawal seizures.
- Alcohol toxicity – This is less common but can happen when a large amount of alcohol is ingested (binge) in a short period of time and the alcohol in the bloodstream is poisonous to the body.
- Excessive fluid and metabolic changes in the body – Drinking large amounts of alcohol over a short period of time will create an imbalance of fluids and electrolytes in the body, causing a dehydrating effect, particularly with a substance like beer.
- Trauma – Injuries may occur from accidents or falls while the person is intoxicated.
- Vitamin or nutritional deficiencies – Long term heavy drinking will affect the absorption of nutrients and is often associated with unhealthy diet.
- Not taking medications – Long term heavy drinking can result in poor memory, missed medications and lack of routine. Not taking antiseizure medication can cause more frequent and severe seizures

## Alcohol can affect antiseizure medications

- People taking antiseizure medications are likely to be more sensitive to the effects of alcohol.
- Alcohol can interfere with the uptake of medication and possibly increase the chance of seizures.
- Some antiseizure medications can enhance the effects of alcohol and make you feel drunk after drinking a small amount.
- Missing a dose, taking extra medication or changing the time of taking medication before drinking alcohol will not alter these effects and may even cause additional unwanted effects or seizures.



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### Can people with epilepsy drink alcohol?

Occasional or light to modest amounts of alcohol does not increase seizures or drastically change the blood levels of antiseizure medication. The effects of alcohol differ from person to person but adults with epilepsy should be able to drink alcohol in small amounts (1-2 drinks per occasion).

**If you've had a reaction or increase in seizures connected with alcohol in the past, then it is best to avoid it.**

It is important to talk to a doctor about the possible effects of alcohol on your seizures and antiseizure medication. Some types of epilepsy may be more sensitive to alcohol ingestion.

### Mixing alcohol with other substances

If alcohol is mixed with other illicit drugs or medication, these combinations can increase the risk of overdosing and enhancing the effects of the substances. There is little research regarding how this affects someone with epilepsy, but the reality is, mixing alcohol with other drugs and medications is not a good choice and can potentially be very harmful.

### Alcohol and high energy drinks

An "energy drink" generally means a non-alcoholic drink that can contain caffeine, taurine (an amino acid), guarana and herbal supplements, such as ginkgo and ginseng. Excessive consumption of energy drinks may cause caffeine intoxication, which can cause rapid heart rate, vomiting, cardiac arrhythmias, seizures, and in extreme cases, death.

Mixing alcohol with energy drinks can be a dangerous combination. Energy drinks can mask the effects of alcohol, so people can end up drinking more alcohol than they might normally. The combination has also been associated with increased risk-taking behaviours.

Mixing alcohol and energy drinks also means high sugar and caffeine ingestion which could increase physical and psychological side effects; such as heart palpitations, problems sleeping, feeling tense, agitated or possibly cause anxiety and panic attacks. It is also likely the risk of seizures is higher with this combination.

**High energy drinks are best avoided in any context**

### What is moderate drinking?

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) suggests for healthy men and women, drinking no more than two standard drinks on any day. This recommendation is for healthy individuals. Although most complications with seizures and alcohol generally occur with long term or binge drinking, having a health condition such as epilepsy can alter what is considered "safe" drinking.

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**A standard drink is 250ml of full-strength beer, or 100ml wine, or 30ml spirits.**

### Why people with epilepsy need to be cautious about alcohol:

1. Alcohol can mix poorly with antiseizure medication, preventing it from reaching the necessary levels in the bloodstream to control seizures.
2. Consuming large amounts of alcohol can trigger seizures.
3. Alcohol can create an imbalance of fluid and electrolytes within the body, causing dehydration.
4. Binge drinking is often associated with late nights, sleep deprivation, missed meals and forgotten medications, all of which can trigger seizures.
5. The effects of alcohol are enhanced when combined with antiseizure medication, meaning you feel "drunk" faster.

### If you want to drink alcohol

- Limit your intake
- Drink slowly
- Drink low alcohol drinks or "mocktails"
- Drink non-alcoholic drinks in-between the alcoholic drinks
- Avoid bingeing, or drinking large amounts of alcohol at once
- Don't make it an all-nighter
- If alcohol makes you feel unwell, you've had seizures in the past related to alcohol, or feel like you may have a seizure, it is best to avoid it altogether.
- Speak to your neurologist or GP for further advice

### Further information:

[Alcohol and drugs](#)

[Medicines and alcohol](#)



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